

language – that was the controlling mechanism. I was to learn, in later years, that during the colonisation that had been experienced in other countries, it was usually the coloniser's desire to delete the natives' tongue in as short a time as possible and impose colonial law upon them.

Along come the Pākehā (Europeans), with a promise of a better world filled with opportunity. A treaty was signed capturing the aspirations of the original partners, only to find that it was, indeed, the instrument that eventually undermined the entire Māori race, almost to the point of extinction. Māori were not ever a conquered people, but the agents of the English language and the imposition of its culture took their toll.

The Treaty of Waitangi (1840, between the English settlers and Māori) is the basis – the cornerstone of New Zealand society. By the law of *contra-preferentum*, we Māori continue to contest the poor and manipulative translation of the meaning of it that does not reflect a Māori understanding of obligations, including those of language rights, as incorporated in this Treaty.

There was also the early settlers' introduction of new and poorly understood strains of diseases. A new religion was introduced to the Māori people, new English laws were introduced, the Māori language was outlawed, and by this total change and manipulation, Māori became paupers in their own country. Such is the way today where Māori are endeavouring to claw back what little they can after the Treaty connivance resulted in a total land loss of some 66 million acres.

The English language clobbering machine has impacted on many countries around the world in exactly the same way. All people, worldwide, belong to this world and, in so doing, express that belonging in the language that they are.

*I te tīmatanga te kupu, ko te atua te kupu ko te atua te kupu i te tīmatanga.*

In the beginning was the word, the word is God. God was the word in the beginning.

Henrietta Maxwell stated this on the television programme *Waka Huia*, TVNZ, on Sunday 12 July 2010: 'If we lose our language, we will lose God'.

Tamati Cairns

*Kaumātua* (respected elder spokesperson for *Tūhoe*)

## 7 The *Malchemy* of English in Sri Lanka: Reinforcing Inequality through Imposing Extra-Linguistic Value

Arjuna Parakrama

Note to readers: This piece is written partly in non-standard language-register discourse to dramatize the fact that the use of broader (up-to-now unacceptable) standards affects neither intelligibility nor clarity, except in the usual substantive ways, by which all language use is governed. The rule-breaking may be arbitrary and inconsistent, but so are the rules it breaks. In fact, I have succeeded if you are unsure whether the *errors* are deliberate or not. In this context, both 'authenticity' and 'appropriateness' need to be re-examined as functions of arbitrary-but-not-innocent categories, which mask their ideological underpinnings through representation as (an impossible) neutrality. I will not gloss 'Lankan' terms: if you need to know what they mean, please take the trouble to find out, just as we have to with 'British' or 'US' usage. We all need to earn the right to eavesdrop on other contexts and cultures – an always (productively) difficult and fraught process – any shortcut that seems to make understanding easy does serious disservice, because it oversimplifies, trivializes and distorts.

*There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarianism and just as a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism also taints the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to the other.*

Walter Benjamin

### Introduction

I done shown Standard spoken English as standing up only for them smug-arse social elites. And it ain't really no different for no written English neither. The tired ways in which the standardized languages steady fucked over the users of other forms had became clear when we went and studied them (post)colonial Englishes. Them 'other' Englishes

came and made it impossible to buy into sacred cows like native speaker authority because there from the getgo there are only habichole users, not natives!

Writing this, in 1990, was excruciatingly difficult for me and went against the grain of all that I'd been taught and assimilated in a lifetime. It seemed crude and vulgar, macho, inappropriate to the core. More than 20 years later, it is still hard to read this as serious theory, whereas my 'academic' version – much less precise, alas, and much less theoretically important – is much more acceptable. Such is the complete control that standards and norms exert on us, which is even prior to ideology, politics and practice.

The hegemony of hip standard languages and cool registers which hide where they are coming from by a shitload of 'arbitrary' rules and 'other-people-in-power-require-'isms, is read for points by these non-standard varieties like and unlike the ones I be mixing and jamming here.<sup>1</sup>

This thingy examines the complex and nuanced ways in which the mainstream discourse around English in Sri Lanka, on the one hand, promises and predicates such extra-linguistic value, while on the other, reinforces discriminatory linguistic hierarchies that exclude and devalue the majority of non-elite users. This is a privileging of English as the language *par excellence* for its ubiquity and resilience, yet maintaining the hidden inter-variety inequalities (despite token counter-claims about the validity of 'newer' forms). It reflects the globalized racism of dominant TEFL/TESL 'theory', which is mindlessly applied in the Sri Lankan context, too, relegating millions of users to the dustbin of linguistic and, in this new twist, moral failure.

In order to do this, I have identified 10 radical propositions on the nature of language and (extra-) linguistic value that I shall test and explain in terms of the Sri Lankan context, which is where I found them hanging out, as it were. Each statement contradicts dominant forms of 'extra-linguistic value', hanging out as legitimate, even objective, linguistic assessments. For instance, in the first proposition, *the* standard is held to be (a) the best; (b) universally accepted by all users (dissimulated as the consensually prestige dialect); and (c) a product of natural evolution – none of which is entirely true. Running through this is the thesis, now taken as self-evident, that English is the language *par excellence*. English is touted as having transformative and magical powers: confusing political currency with inherent value. The deliberate displacement of the discourse of language rights by arguments from economic opportunity and the de-politicization of underclass-forced 'choices', which are dissimulated as free agency (being interfered with by elite hypocrites who claim to speak for the 'masses').

**Proposition 1: Language is a site of struggle which standards cover over. The non-standard is a better indicator of how language works**

That language is a site of struggle is, after Voloshinov, a platitude in post-structuralist circles, but this insight has not been linked to the processes of standardization. The focus has been on the struggle for meaning and not for structure. I have argued till the cows come home that standardization obliterates struggle in, and through, language by representing this as a natural process in no one group's special interest. Borrowing from Marx's description of the universal equivalent, I suggest that, just as the defective form of exchange better represents reality, and the very success of the money form actually serves to hide the fact that what is being compared is human labour, so, too, the 'defective' form of language reveals the struggles that are swept under the carpet of the standard (See Parakrama, 1995, for a more detailed treatment of this homology, and Rossi-Landi (1977) for an extended discussion of the parallels between language and political economy).

If hegemony be maintained through putting up and policing standards, and if a kind of 'passive revolution'<sup>2</sup> manages opposition by allowing for a piss-trickle of the previously non-standard into the standard, then you's resisting when you's refusing, the self-evidence of the rules and the proper. Mistakes and bad taste, whether deliberate or not, whether in organized groups or not (as counter-hegemony), is always subversive, though sometimes 'wastefully' so because they cannot be absorbed into the standard as easily. These non-standard stuff is therefore 'natural' resistance and a sensitive index of non-mainstream against-hegemony. Persistent mistakes and bad taste fuck the system up because they cannot be patronized if you don't accept the explanation, so they fail your ass at the university and say you need remediation like it's the pox.

Standards hide their self-interest and privileged users. Linguists claim merely to be recording the status quo without taking sides, as if recording did not confer value and reinforce hegemony, *pace* Daniel Jones. Champions of the so-called Other (or [post]colonial Englishes) have operated on the basis of the special status of these varieties, thereby justifying the formulation of different criteria for their analysis. A careful examination of the processes of standardization as they affect these 'Others' strips the camouflage from standardization, which can be seen as the hegemony of the 'educated' elites, hence the unquestioned paradigm of the 'educated standard'. These standards are kept in place in 'first world' contexts by a technology of reproduction, which dissimulates this hegemony through the self-represented

neutrality of prestige and precedent, whose selectivity is a function of the politics of publication. In these 'other' situations, the openly conflictual nature of the language context makes such strategies impossible. In Sri Lanka, for instance, the users cannot agree on a standard, hence, it is blatantly imposed, and its discrimination and exclusions are clearly manifest for all to see.

**Proposition 2: Standards are arbitrary but not innocent, and since all standards discriminate (against women, minorities, multiple marginal groups), the broadest local standard is the least iniquitous. There is no linguistic evidence to support the premise that a narrower standard is better than a broader one, or the thesis that there is a definable outer limit beyond which the standard ceases to be effective**

Language in its standardized form, nuanced through a panoply of rite-of-passage styles and registers, artificially creates 'the natural' in several ways. For those of you who abhor this technical vocabulary on the misconception that it is unnecessary jargon, let me rephrase this position. What I am suggesting here is that the natural goodness of the standard is no more self-evident and universally approved than the 'natural goodness' of infant milk foods advertised in the market. What has happened is that the continuous exposure and valuing of the standard, vis-à-vis other variants, has taken on the familiarity-cum-acceptance which has become second nature to us. However, this second nature is neither innocent (in the sense of being independent of class and gender bias – egalitarian), nor universal (in the sense of being trans-historical, acultural, *a priori*).

The basic claim for the classed, 'raced', gendered, regioned nature of the standard language is hardly contested now. Yet, little is done to work against this, except in the insistence of linguistic 'table manners', in order to subvert the most blatant sexism in, say, standard (or, for that matter, not-so-standard) English. Examples of scholarly work in 'dialect' exist both in the US and Britain, but as isolated experiments that seek, quite rightly, to legitimize certain group-interests, rather than as part of a project to explicitly contest/broaden the standard itself. Across the spectrum of disciplinary and ideological views, therefore, there exists a shared and 'self-evident' premise that the standard is clearer, more amenable and, to put it in a nutshell, *better* than the other variants/dialects/forms. If, in fact, the standard is all these things, and, in a sense, it is *now*, given the history of its evolution, this has as little to do with the inherent superiority of the standard, as has the fact that more men are good chess-players than women today to do with superior intelligence or inherent ability. In any case, none of these arguments can be

used against a systematic effort towards broadening the acceptable range of this standard.

Taking the discriminatory nature of the standard seriously and also accepting the necessity of standards, however attenuated, this thesis argues for the active broadening of the standard to include the greatest variety possible; it also holds that the 'acceptable' bounds of general linguistic tolerance will expand with the systematic and sanctioned exposure to such variety.

The lastma final word, then, is to go like crazy for the broadest standard and to be psyched up to steady talk in it, teach your head off in it, write like mad in it, despite of its sometime 'oddness' to our ears, refusing of the uncomfortable laughter, inspite the difficulty, paying no mind to some non-standard users and their liberal advocates having an attitude about it. The ideal, then, is for what is standard now to become contaminated with what is non-standard now, and ass backwards, so much so that everyone will have to know more about what everyone else speaks/writes, and so that not knowing, say, 'black english' will be as much a disqualification as not knowing 'general american'. There should even be room for a certain amount of self-inconsistency as well. Complete intelligibility is a cheap hoax anyway, so it's necessary, yar, to bring this to the up front level, nehi? (Parakrama, 1995: xi)

If I were to risk a generalization, I'd say Sri Lankan scholars in the field are hardly different. The more progressive ones use phrases like 'interference' and 'interlanguage' within quotes, creating a false space between themselves and the concepts they use to understand and rationalize their reality. The term 'prestige' invariably describes the elite standard, carrying three unexamined consequences: consensus (everyone agrees that it is the norm), inevitability (this is naturally so and has come about through a long and levelling process, which should not be tampered with) and innocence (no one is to blame, certainly not the linguist). The misleading notion of the standard as the variety *par excellence* is pervasive.

All this wont be in place for a long time, and mebbe never, but anything else isn't worth this pul try. As teachers we don't often let blatant sexism and racism get by from our students just because their views are shared by many in power all over the world. Why the hell do we excuse away language values and non-language values hidden within language values, then? All things considered, and *ceteris paribus*, it is my expert and dispassionate opinion, therefore, that, in punishing 'error' so brutally yet so selectively and in laying the blame elsewhere, or in saying in the appropriately subdued tone, 'what else can we do?', the language teacher is pimping with a vengeance for the system while masturbating his/her conscience with this 'empowerment' crap. (Parakrama, 1995: xii)



The linguist's responsibility is ultimately the same as the citizen's, but she has a special role in exposing the complicity between language/discourse and power and actively working towards a more informed and egalitarian socius. Lankan scholar-activists need to fight two battles – one within the country and the other outside, as we shall see below. Need to, I say, but, sadly, we do neither really.

**Proposition 3:** Rather than being special-emergent cases, the so-called (post)colonial Englishes are no different from the (post)imperialist Englishes in terms of range, elaboration, nuance, and may, in fact, be better gauges of the ways languages work

Treating the Englishes as equivalent in every way to their 'parent' forms leads to the re-evaluation of cherished linguistic paradigms, such as 'native-speaker authority', since hitherto self-evident categories such as this are fraught in the (post)colonial contexts. For instance, among the thousands of studies spawned by Selinker *et al.* (1975) on 'interlanguage' and 'interference', especially in relation to fossilization and such delightfully prejudicial concepts, I have yet to come across one in which L1 is a so-called first-world language. Hence, it would appear that, for instance, fossilization is a phenomenon peculiar to, and peculiarly symptomatic of, contexts where an L1 user of a 'non-Western' language is learning a 'Western' one. Hence, L1 users of American English learning Tamil do not suffer from this debilitating pathology, because, as we all know, English has alchemic powers unlike the others, correct? In the Lankan context, if we had eyes to see and ears to hear, we would know that what takes place when languages meet in an individual or group is not interference, but *enrichment*. Here, then, is a simple example of how a theoretically weak premise, such as 'interference', comes undone if we critically engage with the lived reality of our multilingual postcolonial contexts, instead of imposing a linguistic apparatus that has little explanatory power, except as a stubborn guardian of the (neo)colonialist hierarchy of languages.

Three ways of classifying 'Other' Englishes have gained currency in the past. These can be described through Standard Lankan English (SLE) as follows:

- (1) (SLE as) Pathology, aberration and sub-standard.
- (2) (SLE as) Special case requiring concessions, emerging norms which need time and encouragement to develop.
- (3) (SLE as) More or less equal to the other, 'older', 'native' Englishes, but 'newer', hence less mature. This is the version espoused by most 'progressives', and its adherents still retain the binary distinctions of older/newer, native/non-native [or nativized], inner/outer [circle],

which smuggles in a clear hierarchy of Englishes, some of which are more equal than others.

I have long proposed a fourth alternative:

- (4) (SLE as) Equal in every way, and also a better indicator of the ways languages work, since the site of struggle is more visibly contested in a shorter time frame (rapid language change and fierce contestation, as if the transformation is 'fast-forward in slow-motion'). What we can only conjecture, based on fragmentary evidence about past developments in English, for instance, we see taking place before our eyes.

Add to this the serious concern that SLE, such as it is, mainly reflects dominant urban elite usage and does not adequately engage with users whose first language is Tamil. SLE, then, manifests yet another tier of linguistic hegemony, as – one must belabour the point – all standards inevitably do. Here it is more liminal, contested, up for grabs and, therefore, impossible to see as consensual, happy-go-lucky, apolitical.

**Proposition 4:** The historical complicities of Linguistics with colonialist knowledge production and the fetishism of objective science continue today in the hierarchizing of languages, the Indo-European theocracy, mainstream ELT and in concepts such as native userhood

This process of policing the (new, yet archaic) standard is not always obvious and is often misread by those who aspire to achieve the gifts bestowed upon 'fluent' English users. They are taught that it is necessary for the achievement of international intelligibility criteria, which is a requirement imposed by the global North. Thus, in this manner, non-elite learners of English in Sri Lanka have to contend with poorly-understood and even outmoded norms – especially in pronunciation – no longer applicable on the *mothership* if they are to break into the rarified inner circle. While progressive voices argue for the global proliferation of national Englishes, (acid) tests such as TOEFL and IELTS still ensure that there is a hierarchy of such varieties. Intelligibility criteria and 'native' status are the most commonly invoked sophisms to justify the hegemony of (the) WEST (White English Standard Testing) in norming transnational usage.

The relationship between language and identity requires careful re-examination, including cherished notions of mother tongue and native userhood. Ethnicity/identity is discursive, not based on any essence.

The decline of the native speaker in numerical terms is likely to be associated with changing ideas about the centrality of the native speaker

to norms of usage... Large numbers of people will learn English as a foreign language in the 21st century and they will need teachers, dictionaries and grammar books. But will they continue to look towards the native speaker for authoritative norms of usage? (Graddol, 1999: 67–68)

This is not very different from Wikipedia, which – to its credit – is more direct and clear.

*Native speakers* of English are people whose first language is English. They learned English when they were children. They think in English. They use it naturally. Usually native speakers of English are people from English-speaking countries like the USA, Great Britain, Australia, Canada, Ireland, etc.

Graddol, like Quirk,<sup>3</sup> conjures an image reminiscent of Caliban (as colonial subject), who, according to Shakespeare, was taught 'language' not 'your language' (Cesaire, 2000). Shakespeare, as a product of his time, has an excuse for being racist, but it seems – in linguistics, at least – the more things change, the more they remain the same. The point, of course, is that now English/Spanish/Portuguese/ French/German/Dutch are Caliban's language too.

That there are 'native speakers' of Malaysian English, Lankan English, Singapore English, etc. is well known. To refer to 'native speakers' of 'English' as only (white) Australians, British, Americans, etc. goes beyond a linguistic assessment to an ideological one. The concept of the 'native speaker' as a homogeneous category is itself problematic, because some 'native speakers' have greater competence than others, and this reflects power, class and education. In Ceylon, in 1954, this was documented, though many linguists still have difficulty accepting it today.

I think most of us would grant, except perhaps the incorrigible purist, that the English spoken by the English-educated class either in their homes or in the more complex contexts of specialized activity is satisfactory enough, and has become native to the class which speaks it today. In that sense it has become a natural medium for their thinking. (Gunatilleke, 1954)

Corpus-based work, though claiming to be more inclusive and value-free, reinforces the same paradigm, since the corpus is always already selective and restricted to 'appropriate' sources. In the following case, the chosen Lankan texts are from 2010 only and appear to disproportionately privilege university contexts.

The International Corpus of English (ICE) project has opened up new pathways for corpus-based comparisons of varieties of English. Launched in the early 1990s (cf. Greenbaum, 1996), the final version of this megacorporus will include approximately 25 components, representing major 'inner-circle' native varieties of English (e.g. Australian, British and US-American English) as well as postcolonial 'outer-circle' varieties (e.g. Indian, Jamaican and Singaporean English)... While some components (e.g. ICE-GB, ICE-IND) have been available for a decade already, many ICE components, especially representing New Englishes in smaller speech communities, are currently being compiled, e.g. ICE-Sri Lanka and ICE-Fiji... There are, however, a number of problems involved in the compilation (and, thus, the analysis) of ICE components of New Englishes. For example, in many postcolonial settings it is not easy to fill certain genre categories (e.g. parliamentary debates in Fiji, given that the parliament has been suspended ever since 2006) and to decide on who qualifies as a speaker of the variety at hand (e.g. in Sri Lanka: what minimum level of English competence? Only L2 speakers, or also local L1 speakers of English? How to deal with the many speakers who have stayed abroad very long?). What is even more challenging is the inherent diachronic gap that has already emerged across ICE components: while the first ICE components include texts from the early 1990s only (e.g. ICE-GB), on-going ICE projects are bound to include texts from 2010 and later (e.g. ICE-Sri Lanka). We have to uphold, however, the general fiction of linguistic stability over the past 20 years in order to be able to treat ICE components as synchronically comparable corpora. (Mukherjee & Schilk, n.d.).

The ludicrousness of Mukherjee and Schilk's 'problems', such as the absence of current parliamentary debates in Fiji (and, hence, a blank slot in the pre-determined corpus framework: no parliament means no English, or what, jolly roger), hide deeper methodological and attitudinal shibboleths that mark this project, not the least of which is 'the general fiction of linguistic stability over the past 20 years'. The point is that while theoretical problems obtain even in Northern contexts, they are most visible as ruptures here. Thus, the tired, old hierarchy of 'New Englishes' (newer than what? Indian English is arguably older than Australian English, for instance) and 'Native Englishes' (native by what standard? Actually native here can only mean 'white' if we're looking for the one common denominator of all the Englishes described as 'native' within mainstream literature) remain unquestioned in this text.

Sanctioned ignorance and, what I call, the 'Columbus-discovered-America' syndrome appear to affect linguists more than other scholars – no doubt a shadow cast by the historical complicity between linguistics and

colonialism. Despite the evidence of 70 years of writing on Lankan English within and outside Sri Lanka/Ceylon,<sup>4</sup> Michael Meyler – who should know better – writes:

My impression is that in recent years there has been increasing awareness of SLE in the academic field... And outside Sri Lanka, there is virtually nothing to show that SLE even exists: many people are ignorant of the fact that there are a significant number of people in Sri Lanka who actually speak English as their first language... Part of the problem has always been the lack of documented evidence showing that SLE exists, and identifying the features that define it.

Not to be outdone, Mukherjee, Schilk and Bernaisch write that:

The rigid Sinhala-only policy of the 1950s propagated Sinhala as the only official language of the island and denied Tamil, the indigenous language spoken by a substantial minority of the island's population (mainly comprising Tamil-speaking Hindus and Muslims in the Northern and Eastern provinces), an equivalent status. Along these lines, English was not considered to be part of the local linguistic repertoire, and it was not until the mid-1980s, after many years of civil war between Sinhala-speaking and Tamil-speaking Sri Lankans, that English was reintroduced in the Constitution of Sri Lanka as a 'link language' alongside Sinhala and Tamil, i.e. as a neutral interethnic means of communication. In spite of the changing status – and societal role – of English in Sri Lanka over the past six decades, the language remained present on the island all the time and became more and more indigenised: without any doubt, it is true that 'Sri Lankan English' is not simply 'English in Sri Lanka', but a variety with a certain regional and social identity. (Meshtrie & Bhatt, 2008: 200).

The passage, symptomatic of the entire article, is so full of errors and oversimplifications that correction will take too long. Suffice to point out, the cavalier approach to key dates (1950s for 1956, mid-1980s for the demonized 13th Amendment to the Constitution of 1987, 'many years of civil war' for three, if that) and the exclusion of over a million Tamil-speaking people (over 5% of the national population) in the central hills. Most egregious, however, is the suggestion that English can serve 'as a neutral interethnic means of communication' in countries where less than 10% speak English with any degree of comfort (See Proposition 5 below). But we're getting sidetracked here. Mukherjee *et al.* present Meshtrie and Bhatt as their Columbus surrogates, who proudly determine that our English is 'a variety with a certain regional and social identity', not 'distinct', but much vaguer, still, we must be grateful for small mercies.

Proposition 5: Present models of mono-, bi- and multi-linguality are based on the interaction of separate individual languages that have no explanatory power (today)

*We only ever speak one language – or rather one idiom only.*

*We never speak only one language – or rather there is no pure idiom.*

Jacques Derrida, Monolingualism of the Other: Or The Prosthesis of Origin (1998, trans. Patrick Mensah)

Figure 7.1 describes the inter-relationships between Sri Lanka's three main languages. It is not the case that the three distinct languages borrow/steal from one another and still remain distinct languages. The interaction transforms each of the languages in a complex process that cannot be equated to simple addition/enrichment of words and phrases. The enrichment goes far deeper. Derrida, referring to his own linguistic legacy as an Algerian Jew speaking French, captures this always-already heterogeneous nature of every single language in multilingual (read, 'all') contexts rather well, I think.

A fuller explanation is required of this phenomenon. I shall merely outline some of the ways in which the conventional explanation of code-mixing and code-switching cannot account for what's going on here. Both 'mixing' and 'switching' do not leave either language inviolate, because this process transforms the meaning that obtains in the original language(s). Languages are not discrete entities *to cut and paste* from, but they exist in dialogic relationships with each other. Moreover, the 'same' borrowing/switch has different meaning(s) depending on interlocutors, sequence, context etc., and the complete utterance (involving multiple languages in

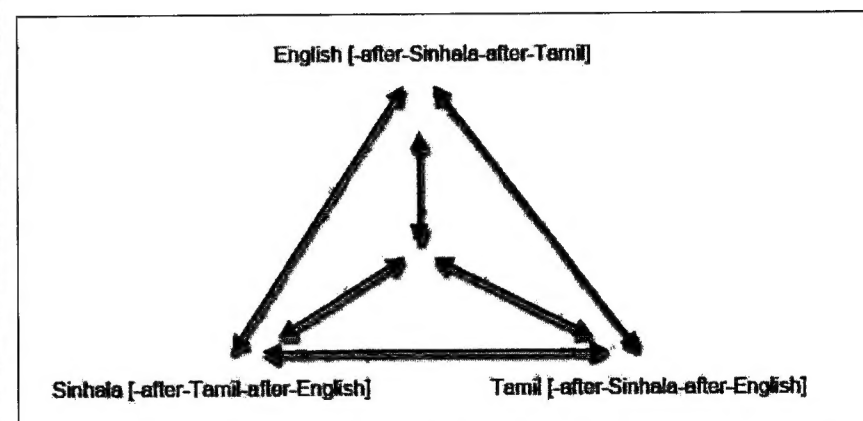


Figure 7.1 Language inter-relationships in Sri Lanka



the old sense) has composite meaning, not reducible to its component parts. In addition, phonetic, syntactic and semantic changes in the original may result from multilingual use and even the language borrowed from is transformed in this exchange. Further confounding simplistic conventional explanations, it is often impossible to distinguish which is L1, L2 or L3 in situations of language exchange, especially in non-elite, everyday discourse in Sri Lanka.

Thus, while upward mobility in general is tightly controlled by economic, political and ideological forces, a few exceptions are permitted to enter the inner portals of (linguistic) power, so that it can be said that the (English) language is neutral and rewards dedicated learners, which is the linguistic version of the 'rags to riches' storyline. Currently, war and post-war politico-economic enterprise has created a new power-language nexus. The new leaders may not be well versed in the niceties of English, but they employ front men and propaganda machines that are.

There is no linguistic reason or justification for the limiting of acceptable variation in language standards. Neither theoretical principle, nor empirical evidence has been offered by linguists of all stripes who discuss standardization and 'describe' standards at work. These are political decisions masquerading as linguistic ones, especially when linguists claim merely to describe what exists.

**Proposition 6: Diglossia and dialectal variation often create greater inequalities than the use of different languages, but language nationalism and purism dissimulates this**

*National consciousness, which is not nationalism, is the only thing that will give us an international dimension.*

Frantz Fanon, 1968: 247

Through the fraught relationships played out among Sinhala, Tamil and English speakers, Sri Lanka provides a nuanced case study of the alignment of language and power in multilingual contexts and demonstrates the key role that diglossia plays in maintaining elite hegemony. Just as global English Language standards dissimulate their elitist nature through entrenching value judgments that have naturalized special interests and represent them as inherently better than other varieties/lects, so, too, with Sinhala and especially Tamil, there is a hierarchy of dialects. Tamil spoken by the Jaffna elites takes pride of place at the expense of Muslim speakers and those living in the tea plantation areas. Adding another layer to this disempowerment of underclass (hence 'uneducated', since they have to begin working for wages at school-going age) users of Sinhala and Tamil is spoken/written-formal/informal diglossia, which denies them access to their own language outside

the familial/community sphere. For Sinhala and Tamil, as well as for English, dominant linguistic paradigms serve narrow political interests, since even in the case of first-language users ('native speakers') of each of these languages, socio-economic class, education and proximity to urban centres determine the extent of inclusion/exclusion and access to language normativity.

Linguistic nationalists may claim that removal of the oppressive language and culture will guarantee equality. This is not even true within a single language, and in a context of multiple linguistic domination, there can be no such simple solution. By analogy from Sinhala and Tamil, a diglossic model for English is predicated in Sri Lanka, and the overwhelming demand is for 'Spoken English', as if it involved widely different grammatical rules and structures, whereas pronunciation – the current index of proficiency policed by the opinion-makers and influence-peddlers – demands conformity that later learners cannot recognize, much less reproduce, due to key sounds not being found in their mother tongues. The confusion is further confounded by a lack of clarity on what is at stake in the discussion of varieties and standards of English, where even teachers do not seem to know how to distinguish or identify varieties clearly. There is, however, the wide perception that external (Western) norms are necessary to validate English – most want to use SBE or IE (Standard British English or International English). Students, teachers, policy-makers and influence-peddlers wanted 'Standard British English' (and, in some cases, 'Standard American English') to be taught to their children (and themselves, of course), but many felt that for rural, under-privileged students who had no English-speaking background, other kinds of English ('Sri Lankan English', often seen as a euphemism for 'Broken English') were OK.

**Proposition 7: Discourse of English as benevolent and neutral access to upward mobility needs unpacking. Access is invariably privileged (gendered/ethnicized/classed), teaching and materials ideological. Demand is deliberately mismatched by supply**

In its dominant versions today, English is presented as conferring magical powers, echoing Kachru's analogy, which credits the language with the transformative potential of alchemy. This claim and self-fulfilling prophecy, which I theorize as a key form of extra-linguistic value, posits that through English competence, *good* learners acquire a range of qualities, including 'intelligence', 'politeness', 'sensitivity' and even 'decency', in addition to the well-established appendages of English, such as wealth, erudition and social credibility. By implication, the English-speaking elites already possess these desirable extra-linguistic qualities and are generous enough to share their superiority with the best of the best learners who need to earn the right to this rare privilege by denouncing others from their original socio-economic

class. Instrumental reasons for learning English have, therefore, been supplemented by value-laden bonuses, and this ideology is being successfully exploited by both international and national business enterprises, such as the British Council and private schools.

The general fraught context of English language learning and teaching signals that there is more at stake than the mere learning of a language. It is in partial recognition of this situation that students themselves express some confusion and anxiety about what they are, in fact, learning. In the (translated) words of one of our respondents:

Something is making learning English difficult for me, for us. I don't know exactly what it is – it is our text book, our teacher, it is the fact that we don't use English outside our classroom, but it is also something else. (Private correspondence, undated)

It is presumed, both naively and disingenuously, that English is not a weapon of oppression – a *Kaduwa* – that hangs over their heads, but rather, it is a neutral and transparent medium, which is equally accessible and benevolent to all. Diametrically opposed to this view are many who see English only as an oppressive class-sword, utterly oblivious to the opportunities for upward mobility and a slice of the pie that the language provides, although selectively, to later-learners in Sri Lanka. These stone-throwers rage against the hegemony of English, but re-inscribe Sinhala dominance over Tamil and often educate their children abroad. This dual and paradoxical role of empowered-for-a-few and oppressor-for-the-many that English so clearly fulfills, vis-à-vis the Sri Lankan underclasses, carries with it crucial psychological baggage for the learner (and teacher), which must be accounted for in any language planning programme or teaching material/methodology formulation that aims at a positive national impact.

The stories about English in Sri Lanka are many and varied. In 200 years of exposure, of which 60 years were post-independence, Sri Lanka has gone through the entire spectrum of attitudes towards English: from hatred to colonialist adulation and imitation to legislated rejection and ridicule. While it is simplistic to claim that at the end of the first decade of the 21st century the response to English has come full cycle, it is nonetheless true that the premium on English-language competence is such that it is the single most important index of legally sanctioned economic and social upward mobility in the country.

However, as described above, unknown to many underclass aspirants for a slice of the pie, pronunciation has become entrenched as a class-marker and passport for those who learnt English at their mother's knee, so to speak, as distinguished from those who learnt English later in life. This policing of the standard ensures that only a few are allowed entrance at the gate to one-of-us-dom, with Lankanisms generally being ghettoized in

creative writing and/or as objects of insider humour, as is commonly seen in other, similar post-colonial contexts.

While the English-speaking elite claims that it is steering a benign meritocracy of equal opportunity, within which the English language is the handmaiden of globalization outcomes and opportunities in Sri Lanka today (as it was of colonialism for 150 years), this narrative of language-opportunity is only one side of the commercial coin, since new and subtler systems of exclusion and marginalization have been set in place. These operate indirectly in the form of class-based assessments of language competence, which stipulate impossible standards for first-generation learners to achieve.

**Proposition 8:** Due to skewed globalization, extra-linguistic value is being conferred on English by an opportunist peripheral market and a complicitous centre, thereby reintroducing colonialist paradigms

'Extra-linguistic value' is a concept I have developed through an analogy with economics, where the notion of extra-economic coercion is well-known as the defining element of feudalism with which capitalism broke, in creating the space for the worker to sell his (alas, it remained a male prerogative for a long time) labour (although not at any real measure of what this labour was worth). Extra-linguistic value can be defined as that value placed on aspects of language and language use which go beyond the legitimate purview of linguistics. For instance, language competence can be measured and fluency mapped in terms of benchmarks, whatever we may think of these benchmarks. These are linguistic values, since they are judgments that are within the legitimate disciplinary space of language use. We needn't agree with the judgments, but if so, the disagreement takes place within the logical space for such judgments. If, however, judgments about a person's intelligence or honesty are made on the basis of his/her competence in English (as measured by pronunciation or adherence to grammatical rules), then this is an example of extra-linguistic value being afforded to English use. If, as I shall establish below, there is a significant increase in extra-linguistic value placed on English in Sri Lanka, it is both a cause and effect of inequality operating in, and through, English in the country. Since English competence (as a proxy for class and privilege) confers power, it is seen to possess qualities and characteristics that transcend language, moving into the realm of ethics and personality.

In a survey undertaken by the Sri Lanka English Language Teachers' Association (SLELTA) in 2010 – covering nearly 500 influential users of the language across the country – a clear pattern emerged regarding the extra-linguistic value conferred on English. Most respondents suggest that the 'appearance of the speaker' is a key element in identifying the variety



spoken. This is an indication that English still comes with strong colonial baggage and much extra-linguistic value added to it. The physical appearance of the speaker should have very little to do with the correctness (or variety) of English spoken. This attitude, however, is consistent with data obtained from other sources.

Evidence for my thesis regarding the extra-linguistic value placed in English as an index of intelligence, personality, general knowledge and suitability for employment, derived from interviews and questionnaire responses, is starkly, shockingly self-explanatory:

#### Private Sector/Management Perspectives (from 30 interviews)

- (1) Good knowledge of English = intelligence = good family background = good personality = high aptitude = demonstrates team spirit.
- (2) Good knowledge of English = a sense of responsibility = sound business sense.
- (3) Good knowledge of English = proper pronunciation = confidence at interviews = fluency.

#### Student/Teacher Perspectives (trends from 200 interviews)

- (1) Good knowledge of English = social mobility = better social status.
- (2) Good knowledge of English = all round ability = decency.
- (3) Good knowledge of English = personality = goodness = intelligence.
- (4) Good knowledge of English = proper pronunciation = confidence at interviews = grammaticality.
- (5) The English (men and women) = good knowledge of English.

This means that learners of English are actually hoping to become better human beings through English, and, as a corollary, people whose English is manifestly impeccable, in their eyes, are 'decent', 'punctual', team players. etc. Note, also, that the neo-colonial value system, which re-invests English in its colonial garb as the purview and prerogative of (white) English men and women, is also thriving here. Many of those interviewed were students of British Council English classes, which have become more popular since the nineties. The values espoused by these students are reminiscent of a by-gone era. We were told that the variety of English that Lankans speak was not 'real' English, and none of the students (aged 15–25) cited any Lankan role models who could match their teachers. *No any*<sup>5</sup> of the parents interviewed were English-speaking, though most said that they would not allow their children to watch anything but English television.

It took us 40-odd years to uncouple the English language from England and the old colonial bandwagon, but the jolly old umbilical cord is still in place, it seems. We've not been able to get an assurance from the British

Council in Sri Lanka that they are committed to valuing all varieties of English equally and that the most appropriate form of English to be used/taught in Sri Lanka is Lankan English. To publicly admit this would be to kiss huge profits goodbye. The resurgence of the British Council as a high-class tuition *kadey* marks the neo-imperialism of Western culture under globalization.

**Proposition 9:** Even at the academic and intellectual level, linguistic/discursive standards and norms naturalize and legitimize prejudice resulting in a double discrimination, which is another (indirect) form of extra-linguistic value hanging out as objective judgments of substance and clarity

A Lankan student wrote an essay containing the following sentence, which I shared with colleagues, who bemoaned the declining standards of English and also the lack of coherent thinking among students that made our task as teachers so much harder. It was not a big deal, just a casual conversation that they soon forgot.

In this Kandiyen wether I not ashamed of my difficulties on learning English and I know that my continuing to write is like ambusing the Department with a bom in my hands.

A few weeks later, I showed some of them the following version, after correcting the obvious sentence-level errors, and their response was an appreciation of the literary allusions.<sup>6</sup> This, clearly, was a student with the right background and sensitivity – rare commodities for us.

In this Kandyan weather I'm not ashamed of my difficulty in learning English, and I know that my continuing to write in the language is like ambushing the Department with a bomb in my hand.

What is telling is that, once the mistakes are fixed, and only once they are fixed, are we ready to recognize that the student is capable of higher-order thinking. If he can't get his grammar and spelling right, then he cannot be intelligent or sensitive enough to be ironic, thoughtful or scholarly. The double discrimination is that language errors pre-empt serious engagement with substance, so that while mistakes are penalized, the ideas expressed by the student are devalued, too. Preliminary work, that Christine Abbott and I did in Pittsburgh in 1990, led to similar conclusions about the assessment of undergraduate student writing, where we found that some African-American students were penalized for using dialectal variations in composition courses and that they were institutionally coerced into writing 'safe', non-ethnically marked texts in order to pass, often doing violence to their creativity and identity.

An analysis of school texts has demonstrated that, in addition to having to learn a language which is not used in their daily lives, Lankan students have to grapple with situations that are both unfamiliar and daunting. The fictional context for the study of English in Sri Lanka is a bonhomous, opportunity-laden world that is ideology-free and equitable, where all children are equally privileged and have access to a luxurious lifestyle, as depicted in the textbook lessons. The sad reality is that students who don't fit this model are marginalized and alienated, even demeaned, by this approach. The most obnoxious and alienating of material takes centre-stage, while the students' own experiences and lifestyles are, in effect, devalued through under-emphasis and trivialization. Hence, the sense of linguistic and cultural insecurity that the average student faces when confronted with English is reinforced. Language teaching, in this form, becomes identical with a classed, 'nationed' (British, in this case, but in others, US, though aggrandized as 'American') and regioned acculturation. This may be less legitimate in a context where the language concerned has no roots/history/currency in this country – in teaching a *foreign* language, for instance – but English is very much a Lankan language, though not necessarily in the specific form taught in schools today. The point is that the 'foreignness' of English is being emphasized through such texts and methodologies, not its 'nativeness'.

Students are invited, encouraged and even enticed into becoming everything but themselves. The ordinary rural students – sons and daughters of farmers or plantation workers who comprise the overwhelming majority of those in the classrooms around the country – are required to imagine themselves in another time, in another place, in another socio-economic class and in another geographical location. In short, any place but where they are. The difficulty of learning an oppressive language is made twice as difficult through this alien, and alienating, material.

Not only are the school texts unsuitable for rural students, Tamil-speaking and non Buddhist students have an additional tier of exclusion to grapple with. Their texts follow the current dominant paradigm that Lankan history is the triumphal march of Buddhism as it overcomes Indian/Tamil/Hindu opposition. Here, as elsewhere in the teaching of English in Sri Lanka, another category of extra-linguistic value has been smuggled in as purely linguistic. Here, learning English is not learning a language that is legitimately Sri Lankan – in the technical vocabulary, an institutionalized variety – but learning a way of life that is at once *classist* and (neo) colonial in character, as well as discriminatory and alienating to those who do not have the 'right background'. This means that to a student who already finds the language difficult, there are more debilitating factors that hinder and psychologically affect his/her progress. So, too, are those rural English teachers who are not from the anglicized middle-class milieu of teachers to be found in privileged national and private schools in the major cities. Most of these English (assistant) teachers have little access to the lifestyle and worldview of this

material and are therefore uncomfortable with teaching from these texts, resulting in their students being doubly disempowered.

### Proposition 10: Elite gate-keeping of 'standards' and humiliation of non-elite learners lead to 'pathologies', which need to be read as resistance, not collective imbecility

The danger of insistence on 'arbitrary', external language standards includes the fact that it pathologizes learners, debilitates non-elite teachers, reinforces hegemony and other hierarchies, straitjackets user creativity into 'safe' structures and fetishizes native-speaker gobbledygook, and it comes already based on a theoretically unsound model of discrete language use. The implicit argument is that other varieties, especially from former colonies, are inferior to THE Standard (Standard British/US English). However, in the case of the post-colonial varieties, these norms are contested – not beyond question – and, hence, have to be justified or, if not, their relationship to power is exposed.

There is another kind of argument related to international intelligibility, where we are advised to learn SBE in order to facilitate global communication, have access to information flows and compete for lucrative jobs. The intelligibility hoax does not stand up to scrutiny. If it is 'international' intelligibility that is the objective, surely all users are equally important. Not so for the intelligibility-wallahs, who are only interested in peddling ease of understanding for the old hierarchy (native, northern, white, elite). Why is the intelligibility argument not brought up in relation to southern US drawlers or Scottish accents? If it is to do with numbers, shouldn't we all measure whether the Chinese or the Indians can understand us? 'International' meanings privilege English/American meanings, which are falsely represented as being universal (beyond the self-interest of an individual variety), whereas other meanings (and vocabulary) are deemed to be restricted and specialized.

Kandiah, who has done pioneering work in the area of Lankan English, has identified some of these 'errors' as *schizoglossia*, which he relates to hypercorrection. Kandiah's argument that the phenomenon of hypercorrection is inadequate to explain errors in the speech and writing of Lankan users low on the cline of bilingualism, is well taken. In fact, all I have tried to do here is to push the argument a little further and deeper, clearly acknowledging his influence (Parakrama, 1997). In pronunciation alone, the *p/f* substitution he observes can be supplemented in each of the following cases as well; *s/z* substitution, *a/e* substitution, consonantal cluster substitution and so on – many of these are even demonstrated by users high on the cline. It is important to note here that pronunciation is now the class-marker among Lankan speakers of English, with later-learners still being ridiculed and imitated. Too much, therefore, rides on pronunciation

and other indices of inter-generational familiarity, which the non-elite learner cannot even recognize.

This linguistic insecurity, which has been brought about by extra-linguistic pressure, is also visible in the learner's ability to grasp – in key instances – the role and function of English within a given context on the one hand and, on the other, to indulge in excessive formalism and gaucheness, not to mention inappropriate usage. The end result is the same from opposite poles, as it were, and malapropism rules the day. The written language is stilted, archaic, pretentious, even servile, and most conspicuously verbose to the point of caricature, as can be seen from this example.

### Post of Stenographer or Steno-Secretary

I am a Sinhala Buddhist religionist; a Steno Secretary and a Stenographer by profession. I have pulled through:

- (1) Diploma-in-Journalism – English
- (2) Teachers' Diploma

Being a speed-writing calibre, I am able to stylograph your flawless diction in phonographical strokes at a speed of 110–120 w.p.m. I also can manipulate a SINHALA key-board typographical contraption at a moderate speed. I have gleaned a wealth of work experience in various aspects of secretarial functions and able to draft Inward and outward routine correspondence independently.

At present I am serving under an eminent legal luminary at his residential office in the capacity of Steno-secretary on a temporary basis and that too by fits and starts due to work availability.

Should your goodself acquiesce in defraying me a substantial payment of emolument to commensurate my labour, work experience, etc, I wish to state that I am desirous of taking up assignment with immediate effect.

In marked contrast, 'Good' learners imitate external norms and standards, often archaic and inappropriate. 'Good' learners tend to show off what they know and are quite comfortable with the ideology of English, vis-à-vis Sinhala and Tamil in Sri Lanka. Good Learners think 'Englishly', a la West and Macaulay (Minute on Indian Education, 1835). Good learners are upwardly mobile and *vice versa*.

We now have an ethico-political dilemma, which we can choose to dissimulate as an apolitical professional concern for 'Good English' and for not patronizing our students by offering them an inferior variety. Yet pushing the discriminatory standard as if it were self-evidently the best

performs epistemic and cultural violence and straitjackets learners into unproductive and sterile forms of expression. The following example dramatizes precisely this predicament:

### Conclusion of an undergraduate essay on 'The Importance of English'

The spread of the English Language widely in the world does not imply that learning English is easy. The learning of English has several barriers and the worst of it is spelling! As English spelling is not a direct reflection of pronunciation, non-native learners face problems. This can be avoided by proper guidance given to the learner to learn proper English. English spelling has been described as 'notoriously confusing' by one scholar. Another problem a learner will face is unpredictability in spelling .....

Despite these defects English should be celebrated as remarkable, and we have to agree with Edward Thomas who described the Language as:

You English words, I know you:  
You are light as dreams, tough as oak,  
Precious as gold on poppies and corn  
Or an old cloak

Considering these qualities of the English Language, it should be said that English is important at all levels of education, for professionals and all the other people in the world.

This piece was written by a university student who was considered excellent by her lecturers. Yet the sentiments are all borrowed and contrived, like the poetic metaphors she claims to share common ground with. One is starkly reminded of Godfrey Gunatilleke's epochal essay, 'A Language without Metaphor', because it is precisely this cultural wasteland that our stellar student inhabits, that we – in a sense – invite her to call home. She dreams in English (which may be fair enough, because some of us, in fact, do), but the added identification of the texture of English with oak wood (perhaps she has lived in the West?), its cloak-like comfort/protection and its value in the glitter of poppies and corn (all of which are alien and disturbingly outside the social and linguistic experience of even the most elite of Lankan English speakers) pushes us towards the conclusion that this is vicarious and learned, not lived, experience. The values here are unabashedly elite, as seen in the throwaway tokenism of the last line, where English is identified as important for professionals (us) and 'all other people in the world' (them).

The non-standard is one of the most accessible means of 'natural' resistance and, therefore, one of the most sensitive indices of de-hegemonization.



Fortunately, non-elite language users do not read linguistic analyses. In fact, I shall argue their entire linguistic practice is an implicit critique of such theories. This intervention will end with a close examination of the nature of non-standard (English) language use as resistance against hegemonic standards and norms. What has been devalued and pathologized in ELS will be read against the grain as a complex process of dehegemonization, which needs to be taken seriously as an antidote to the *malchemy* (negative alchemy) of English in this phase of post/neo-coloniality and as a response to the absurd, yet pernicious extra-linguistic discourse around World English or English as Lingua Franca.<sup>7</sup>

Resistance and protest are also normed by dominant perceptions of what forms and contexts opposition should take. Of these essential attributes of resistance – as we recognize it within the dominant discourse – *rationality and intention* surely take pride of place. We are unused to conceiving of unthinking, unmotivated, even irrational acts as resistance. Yet I suggest that ours is a model based on the tyranny of those who share and participate in the dominant discourse. There is no room in this model for the radical alterity of those who are not caught within the nexus of power/access to power/the possibility of access to power in the future. For those outside the pale, as it were, the logic of resistance and protest, as we understand it, does not clinch. For this group, for whom the trendy term would be 'subaltern', other paradigms of resistance and protest need to be conceptualized, since, to echo Ranajit Guha, there is dominance without hegemony.

Thus, it is for the 'weak', in this sense, that there appears a need to use other weapons than we do, and it is important for any sensitive analysis of language or the society to see the possibility and potential of *persistent mistakes and errors* as being the reflection of something other than collective failure. Otherwise, we are doomed to making absurd claims such as: 'There are no bright students in the villages. They have all come to the city by now'. Our TESL/TEFL/World Englishes echo of this thematic would have to generalize about the idiocy and incompetence of at least 19.5 million people (out of 20.5) in Sri Lanka.

The refusal to recognize what is actually happening in, through and around English in Sri Lanka, is to reduce oneself to non-intervention and apathy in the face of systematic discrimination and structurally nurtured insecurity, which leads to the kinds of 'pathology' or 'aberration' that I shall spell out here. Let me reiterate that *the pathology*, in this view, is not with the learner, but within the system. It is a condition that forces learners to resort to the kinds of self-blame and debilitation we have described. Yet we must also be aware of the impossibility of translation, the untenability of all origins, the self-interest of all normative systems and the vigilance against counter-hegemonies, which, in turn, re-inscribe other hierarchies.

## Conclusion

It is no surprise, then, that the English teaching/learning practiced in Sri Lanka has been a colossal and costly failure<sup>8</sup> for over 50 years, and English usage continues to reinforce inequality even today, because:

- (a) it asks rural non-elite (and urban underclass) students not to learn a language so much as to take on the worldview and values of the urban, upwardly-mobile upper/middle class;
- (b) it devalues authentic Lankan experience, metaphor and idiom and calls for an alien and alienating variety and worldview of English that is rife with archaisms and excessive formality;
- (c) it confers on English an illegitimate, added (extra-linguistic) value that lies outside the realm of language use;
- (d) its materials and teaching modalities, its governance and assessment structures (including teacher training and certification) are inappropriate and counter-productive;
- (e) it uses pronunciation as a class-marker and gatekeeper, precisely because this distinguishes home-learners (the urban elite) from school-learners (the rest) of English;
- (f) it stigmatizes certain types of usage seen as gross errors, which become the target of ridicule and, hence, traumatize users, creating pathologies of *lajja-baya*; and
- (g) it is majoritarian Sinhala in its orientation, and it discriminates against Tamil-speakers (see Canagarajah for an account of this process).

This critique does not seek to devalue the excellent contributions made to English teaching in certain specific situations or to deny the wonderful individual success stories that every structural failure feeds upon as alibis for maintaining the status quo. Yet the aggregate effect is a calamitous reproduction of elite control and a slow trickle upwards. English is not the panacea for success that it is touted to be, but at the same time, its systemic denial to those who desire to learn the language is indefensible.

It's now a truism that language, in its broader sense, is the only access we have to everything outside of ourselves, not to mention our access to ourselves (or to use Wittgenstein's beautiful, but now trivialized phrase, 'my language is my world') in the philosophical sense. This language, in the narrow sense, is also the vehicle – witting or unwitting – of values and ideology that, historically and today, have taken sides. Or in a less theoretical formulation, the fact that 'villain' originally meant 'peasant' and 'blackguard' derived from 'kitchen worker' only goes to show just who is winning the war of words – power is ultimately the ability to make meaning stick, and to do this, one has to be heard. Or to use an example from Sinhala, how the word for interpreter in early colonial times ('dubash') became the word to describe debased culture

('thuppahi'). Thus, standardization adds another more insidious dimension to this struggle, since it controls and regulates structure, pronunciation, register, style and so on, which serves to exclude many voices.

The hardest part for us, within these dominant paradigms, is, of course, the unlearning of our privilege in/through language. In the 20 or so years that I have been discussing these ideas with academics, teachers, intellectuals and anyone interested, the most persistent anxiety has centred around this issue of the (loss of) authority/control, through it is invariably couched in worries about 'What will be taught in the classroom, then?' or 'Who will decide what is right and wrong?' In this broader standard, linguistic insecurity will diminish and, with it, many of the blatantly classist elements of English in Sri Lanka. If it comes to the stage where (almost) anything goes and where meaning is the arbiter of acceptance and where it is extremely difficult to reject one kind of usage in favour of another, then language would have become as level as it would get, which is not much.

Here we come full cycle, then, to the point at which our aim – as teachers of the standard, bearers of the torch, etc. – is to destabilize, broaden this standard towards the creation of a situation where the onus is on us to learn (or rather, unlearn) to read our students' persistent errors as resistance with or without demonstrable intention and to respect its radical difference. Ours was the privilege as linguists, teachers, codifiers, standard bearers and so on to confer the privilege of language on these other Calibans so that their profit on't was to curse us in it. Let the roles be reversed: let us learn their (version of) language to earn the right to the privilege of ours. Otherwise, we're simply acting out the words of Wittgenstein: a crack is showing in the system, and we're trying to stuff it with straw, but to quieten our conscience, we're using only the *best* straw.

## Notes

- (1) Two observations. This is a mish-mash because the brother wants to show-off essentialist notions of dialect use, which ghettoize non-standard forms. Black English is not spoken only by blacks, nor do all blacks speak it, no? This means also that questions of 'authenticity' and 'appropriateness' (semi-literates can only talk in 'vulgarisms') must also be questioned like a motherfucker. This, of course, does not let whatever dialect or *tuppahi* mish-mash language off the hook if it is racist, regionalist, and so on and so forth. Second, why is the 'appropriate' liberal response to this *achcharu* a snicker-giggle? What does this cover-up? At what point in these matters does proving a point become also interventionist practice, not tokenism? This operation can then be termed 'strategic de-essentialization' to parody or upside-downify Spivak's phrase. It attacks notions of (originary) purity, even in the oppressed linguistic situation, and confronts the issue of mediated representation through language form. To trash Wittgenstein for a worthy cause, if language be a form of life, then the form of language is telling us nothing epistemologically new about the form of this form of life. What is up for grabs are habits and practices, contextually creative vocabularies and so on, but not systems/possibilities/limits of knowing, because, after all, standard and non-standard forms of language are so differentiated for political reasons, not philosophical ones.

- (2) *Contra* Gramsci, not merely restricted to relatively weak hegemony, but also strong, pre-empting effective counter-hegemony.
- (3) 'The existence of standards (in moral and sexual behaviour, in dress, in taste generally) is an endemic feature of our mortal condition and... people feel alienated and disoriented if a standard seems to be missing in any one of these areas... Certainly, ordinary folk, with their ordinary common sense, have gone on knowing that there are standards in language and they have gone on crying out to be taught them'. (Quirk, 1985: 5–6).
- (4) See S. Fernando, M. Gunasekera and A. Parakrama (eds) (2010) *English in Sri Lanka: Ceylon English, Lankan English, Sri Lankan English*. Colombo: Aitken Spence.
- (5) This 'error' is one that makes elite Lankan English speakers wince or smirk, depending on their politics. It is pervasively used in both writing and speech by the majority of Lankans who are not 'mother's knee' English acquirers. This, then, is a key example of both the arbitrariness of the rules of usage, as well as the ways these rules are used to exclude and demean the 'other'. The (mis)use of 'there' for 'their', and vice versa, is another no-no I've smuggled in to this text, as is the (incorrect) use of 'the', especially in relation to 'society', 'nature', etc. A fourth example is the (over)use of the present continuous tense. I want readers to disagree about what is a grammatical/discourse rule and what following such rules involves (not, of course, in Wittgenstein's philosophical sense). Why can't the same word convey multiple meanings here, as elsewhere in English, for instance? Once this discussion moves beyond quasi-arguments, such as you-must-follow-the-rule 'because the sky is so high...', we're already chipping away at language hegemony.
- (6) Lakdasa Wikramasingha, a radical Lankan poet, wrote 'In this Kandyan weather there is/ no shame in having in your bed / a servant maid –' (*To My Friend Aldred*) and 'The poet is the one who is always preparing / The ambush' (*The Poet*) and 'He is the one that, tossing a bomb into / The crowd, takes notes' (*The Poet*).
- (7) Here, as elsewhere in this piece, my debt to Pennycook and Phillipson is gratefully acknowledged, though the mess I've made remains my sole responsibility.
- (8) For conspiracy theorists, this could also be the 'success' of English language policy and implementation, because it does not democratize access and reinforces the gatekeeping role of an English-speaking *class* that is fast losing its economic stranglehold, but still has a power-brokering and influence-peddling role to play in Lankan society. The same argument can be adduced to Bandaranaike's language policy, which, in addition to discriminating against Tamil-speakers, also reinforced the *de facto* hegemony of English by creating barriers for its easy access.

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## 8 English Language as Governess: Expatriate English Teaching Schemes in Hong Kong

Eugene Chen Eoyang, Pauline Bunce and Vaughan Rapatahana

*There is no explicitly formulated language educational policy in Hong Kong... Whatever undefinable language educational policy Government has, it can claim very little educational achievement except the success in creating a demand for English education...*  
Cheng et al., 1973: 15, 27

*Sometimes it comes to mind that the compulsory learning of English in schools is one of the British government's political strategies... the teaching of English is a kind of cultural intrusion in Hong Kong and may be regarded as a political weapon.*  
Eva Wai Yin, quoted in Pennycook, 1998b: 190

*The problem is that Hong Kong's colonial history has created a system of schooling in which English-medium education has come to be regarded both as an avenue to better life chances and as a marker of social status for the local middle class... a vested interest to be defended at all costs.*  
Sweeting & Vickers, 2007: 34

The Hong Kong community's attitude towards the English language can be rather schizophrenic. There is a definite desire for it, rooted in instrumental and social motivations, but there also exists a kind of aloof indifference towards it. As Evans (2008a: 360) has noted, this schizoid attitude commenced in the early days of 19th century colonialism, with – as just one example – ‘students at Queen's College... [who] extracted what they wanted from their studies... with attitudes towards the British that were rarely more positive than coolly indifferent’.

By examining the history of the territory's many Native English-speaking Teacher (NET) schemes and, in particular, the most recent Enhanced NET Scheme of 1998 as an example of this schizophrenic attitude, this chapter will cast the English language as a stern and intractable governess from England who just never seems to go away, but whose conspicuous



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# English Language as Hydra

Its Impacts on Non-English Language Cultures

Edited by

**Vaughan Rapatahana and Pauline Bunce**

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## Contributors

### Lalaine F. Yanilla Aquino

Associate Professor, Department of English and Comparative Literature, College of Arts and Letters, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines.

I am Lalaine F. Yanilla Aquino, a Filipino and a Professor of English Studies. I have lived in the Philippines all my life, and I am a product of the Bilingual Education Policy (BEP), in which English is one of the two media of instruction. My first language is Tagalog – the language of my father, who is from Tayabas, Quezon. I can comprehend a little Aklanon – the language of my mother, who is from Aklan and a little Kapampangan – the language of my husband, who is from Pampanga. At home, my husband and I use Filipino in conversing with our children, who are all studying now still under the BEP. My very own linguistic history and experience is a good example of the multilingual country that is the Philippines. Though I have nothing against English being used as a medium of instruction in Philippine schools, I strongly believe that Filipino children have the right to learn the basic concepts and skills (and literacy, as well) *initially* in their mother tongue. The Philippine government owes it to the Filipino people to give its support, in terms of providing instructional materials, teacher training and other necessary infrastructures, as a recognition of this right.

### Xavier Barker

Member of the Nauru Language Committee, ex-Director (Acting), University of the South Pacific campus, Republic of Nauru.

My name is Xavier Barker. I am both an Australian and a Nauruan, who has been educated in Australia and the Pacific. I am currently studying Language Endangerment at Monash University in Melbourne. The shift to English began with my English-teaching father and it has been completed in my children's generation, who do not know any Nauruan. As both a member of the most recent manifestation of the Nauru Language Committee and as a Campus Coordinator of the University of the South Pacific in Nauru, I have not advocated removing English from Nauruan schools, but I have strongly encouraged the maintenance of Nauruan, alongside the learning of English as a second language. It is important, whilst forging a unique identity for Nauru, which recognizes our past, that we remain pragmatic enough to recognize that English is the most widely spoken Pacific language.



### Jeanie Bell

Lecturer, Centre for Australian Languages and Linguistics, Batchelor Institute for Indigenous Tertiary Education, Northern Territory, Australia.

My first language is English, and I identify as a member of the Jagera and Dulingbara clan groups of south-east Queensland, Australia. I use words from a range of Aboriginal languages mixed in with English on a daily basis. I also regularly speak a variety of Aboriginal English. As an adult, I have studied and learnt, from recorded documentation, my heritage language Badjala from Gari (Fraser Island), and while I technically know this language and its grammar, I only use it in limited situations.

### Pauline Bunce

English Teacher, Perth, Western Australia; Former teacher-in-charge, secondary classes, Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

My name is Pauline, and I am an out-of-touch Australian with British roots. While Australia is undoubtedly my home, there are often times when I do not necessarily feel 'at home' in the country. I have lived more than half of my life outside mainstream Australian society, in various parts of Asia and in Asian parts of Australia. As a Malay speaker, there are times when I feel almost Asian, and there are other times when I struggle to be fully Australian. I'm now teaching English to adolescent new arrivals and refugees in an Australian school. It isn't always easy to live in intersecting worlds, but I wouldn't want it any other way.

### Tamati Cairns

Kaumatua, Te iwi o Tuhoe, Aotearoa-New Zealand

My parents, Erina Rotarangi nee Cairns (Tuhoe) and Karaihe Rotarangi (Ngati Raukawa), gave birth to their fourth of 15 siblings (that's me) in Mokai, known as Te Pae o Raukawa, on the floor of my grandmother Teiria and grandfather Rotarangi Hamilton's lounge. Mokai is approximately 30 kilometres north-west of Taupo. By virtue of a decision made by my Grandmother Teiria, I was given to my *Koroua* and *Kuia* and raised in the small Māori community of Ruatahuna, in the heart of the Te Urewera homeland. Ruatahuna is surrounded by an aged native forest, known today as the Urewera National Park, and is a valley that supports a small farming and hunting community. Ruatahuna is referred to as the heartland of the Tuhoe people, *te Kohanga o Tuhoe*.

The adoption had been via Māori custom and tradition, *Matua Whangai*, and also what appears to be a pragmatic solution to a *whanau* birth explosion. There must have been other reasons that only the *Kuia* and the *Koroua* and the wisdom of 'Old' would know, and the foresight of such a decision, for whatever the reason. I shall be forever in their debt, having been blessed

with the fluency of *te Reo Māori me oona tikanga* and the privilege of growing up in such a special place, Ruatahuna.

### Eugene Chen Eoyang

Professor Emeritus of Comparative Literature and of East Asian Languages and Cultures, Indiana University, USA; Chair Professor Emeritus of English, Humanities and Translation and former Director of General Education, Lingnan University, Hong Kong.

My name is Eugene Chen Eoyang, and I learned English at an English Grammar School as a Chinese refugee in Karachi (India, as it was then) under the Raj. At the age of seven, my mother brought us to America, where I quickly converted my English-accented English to something like Brooklynese. Appalled by this decline in the 'quality' of my English, my father put me in another school, where the teaching (and the accent) was better. I graduated from Harvard with a degree in English and earned an MA in English Literature at Columbia University. After a six-year stint in publishing (Doubleday), I pursued a PhD in comparative literature at Indiana University, where I taught, on and off, for 33 years. In 1996, I moved to Hong Kong, where I taught in the English Department at Lingnam University for 12 years (serving as head from 2006–2007) – with the exception of three semesters' leave, when I returned to teach at Indiana University. From 2000–2008, I also directed the General Education Programme at Lingnan. I think my Dad (who died in 1987) might have been pleased that I was admitted in 2001 as a fellow of the British Royal Society for the encouragement of the arts, merchandise and commerce.

### Noor Azam Haji-Othman

Director of the Language Centre, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Brunei Darussalam.

My name is Noor Azam from Brunei, a former British protectorate on the north-east coast of Borneo Island. I am of mixed heritage, with a Dusun father and Tutong mother, whose traditional languages I speak, in addition to Malay and English. I was born and bred in Tutong District, a harmonious blend of ethnic cultures, faiths and languages, all of which can be heard overlapping each other around a coffee table in town. I have always spoken English as far as I can remember, it being a widespread language in Brunei both outside and in the schools. At 17, I left for studies in the UK, returning for good only after about 14 years. Ironically, it took a British university, French language courses and an inspiring German professor to make me realise the immense significance of going back to my roots and conducting research on the traditional languages and cultures of Brunei.

## Sandra Land

Lecturer, Centre for Adult Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Republic of South Africa.

My name is Sandra, and I am a white South African. I am confident that I am South African, but beyond that I fall into doubt – am I an African? I think I might be, but my black African compatriots tend to laugh at me if I say so, even though I can make the statement fluently in isiZulu. Although three of my grandparents were British, I do not think I am British, and British officials assure me emphatically that my ancestry gives me no claim to British nationality. Rejected then by both Africa and Europe, I am, continentally speaking, an outcast, a vagrant relic of colonialism, but, as someone who undoubtedly benefited by being born on the privileged side of apartheid, perhaps a worthy heir to the rejection inflicted on so many by successive governments of my twisted, torn, beloved country.

## Anne-Marie de Mejía

Associate Professor, Centre for Research and Teacher Education, Universidad de los Andes, Bogota, Colombia.

I was born and grew up in London. However, I always suspected that I would one day live 'abroad'. Since I was young, I had always heard about the importance of our French ancestors, and although I had a very English upbringing, I increasingly wanted to explore other parts of the world, very different to the UK. Through a series of circumstances, I ended up in Colombia, where I live and work and feel very much at home, having now spent more of my adult life here than in the UK. My children, on the other hand, though largely brought up in Colombia, have travelled in the other direction – to the UK.

## Muhammad Haji Salleh

Malaysia's National Laureate, Professor School of Humanities and Senior Fellow, Centre for Policy Research and International Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang.

Though I was born in Malaysia and began to speak Malay early, the progress of my schooling was a gradual emptying of the Malay and replacing it with the colonial language. For a long time, I was alienated from the tongue of Malaysia and functioned reasonably well in English. However, after being culturally and linguistically lost in Europe, the US and Asia for more than three decades, I have returned to my mother tongue, to write in it, and I made a conscious decision to stop writing poetry (my main and most intimate genre) in English. Now I am in the process of digging into the epistemology of the language and culture. Recently, I have written on the poetics of Malay literature. Otherwise, I teach, write essays and translate. I

now have some 50 books of poems, essays, theoretical explorations, translation, etc.

## Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o

Distinguished Professor, Comparative Literature and English, University of California, Irvine, USA.

Call me Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (pronounced 'Googey wa Theeongo'), in short, Ngũgĩ. In my recent memoir of childhood, *Dreams in a Time of War*, I have talked about growing up in Limuru Kenya, where I was born in 1938. I went to school during the years of the Mau Mau armed struggle against British colonial settler rule. Kenya's independence was in 1963. I speak three languages – Gĩkũyũ, Kiswahili and English. Currently, I am Distinguished Professor of English and Comparative literature at the University of California. I write my fiction, drama and poetry in Gĩkũyũ only. I have published a small journalistic piece in Kiswahili. I write my academic books in English. I believe in translations as a way of making languages and cultures give and take from each other equally.

## Robyn Ober

Researcher, Batchelor Institute for Indigenous Tertiary Education, Northern Territory, Australia.

I identify as a Murri (Aboriginal) woman, with connections to the Djirribal/Mamu rainforest people in North Queensland, through my mother, and the KuKu Yalandji, through my father. I do not speak my heritage languages, because of past government policies and historical events which had a huge impact on Indigenous Australian languages. I speak a dialect of Australian English known as Aboriginal English or Murri English, which is a distinct North Queensland dialect. This is my first language, but, of course, I also speak and code-switch to Standard Australian English as the need arises. I am very interested in the history and emergence of Aboriginal English as a contemporary Indigenous language in Australia.

## Arjuna Parakrama

Former Professor and Chair of English, Peradeniya University, Sri Lanka.

Among academics, I'm often seen disapprovingly as an activist, and among activists, I'm invariably treated with some suspicion as an academic, both fraught relationships generating productive unease. Not fitting in seems to be my fate and forte. This analysis of language and power stems from my broader lifework (un-)learning from multiple marginalised communities and my doomed attempts at understanding the nature of subaltern resistance to dominant discourse. I love teaching and that's about

the only thing I seem to do, in whatever job I find myself. When I'm convinced that I'm of no more use to anybody, I'm going to spend my days birdwatching and writing poetry. I'm almost there now.

### Joseph Sung-Yul Park

Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, National University of Singapore, Singapore.

I am a Korean-American who was born in the US, but grew up in Seoul, South Korea. As I reveal in my chapter, even though I identify myself as Korean, there are many aspects of my life that make me feel unsure of my sense of belonging. This is particularly so as I have spent a large part of my adult life outside of Korea, including the USA, Macau and Singapore. As I grow older, I feel less certain about where 'home' might be for me. But that has also given me ample opportunities to think about the questions of belonging and identity.

### Alastair Pennycook

Professor of Language Studies, University of Technology, Sydney, Australia.

I have been working for many years in language education in many parts of the world, and for much of that time, I have been struggling to make sense of English, the role it has played historically, its contemporary role in relation to globalization, the damage it does, the hope it brings. Now that I have the privilege of a senior academic position and the chance to travel even more widely around the world, listening to teachers, looking at linguistic landscapes, talking to people from so many different backgrounds, I continue to ask these questions around English, endlessly exploring the ways it is understood, taken up, rejected and discarded and trying to work out its shifting relation to other languages. I remain puzzled and troubled.

### Robert Phillipson

Professor, Department of International Language Studies and Computational Linguistics, Copenhagen Business School, Denmark.

After a conventional middle-class British upbringing, I worked for the British Council in English teaching in post-colonial Algeria and communist Yugoslavia. Strong influences in my exile have been living in more socially just Scandinavia, work at a university stressing multi-disciplinarity, critical scholarship from Africa and India and writing with my radical wife, Tove Skutnabb-Kangas. I continue to be appalled by the hypocrisy of the West in educational language policy. I attempt to undermine linguistic imperialism, to strengthen linguistic diversity locally, in the EU system and through collaboration with inspiring scholars from many parts of the world.

### Vaughan Rapatahana

Native English-speaking Teacher, Hong Kong.

Former head of English departments in Aotearoa-New Zealand, Republic of Nauru, Brunei Darussalam, P.R. China.

Vaughan Rapatahana feels his viewpoint is well covered in the Genesis of this Book and the Introduction, respectively.

### Rani Samant Rubdy

Associate Professor, English Language and Literature, National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

As an Indian who grew up to an awareness of the many rich subcultures that co-exist within what may be called the Indian culture, I have come to regard linguistic diversity as a natural and indistinguishable part of cultural diversity. And so I see the imposition of any uniform or common language on a multilingual country, such as India or Singapore, as wholly unsuitable to (indeed, as violating) their very spirit and ethos. The basic problem is that having gained independence, we have striven to be no more than imitators of the West in shaping our social, political and cultural ideologies (biases, really), instead of recognizing the complexity and uniqueness of our situation and evolving our own solutions. This we have yet to do. A good beginning would be to stop thinking of our linguistic situation as a problem and start building on its strengths.

### Graham Hingangaroa Smith

Distinguished Professor. Vice Chancellor/Chief Executive Officer, *Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi*: indigenous-university, Whakatane, Aotearoa-New Zealand.

My name is Hingangaroa Smith. I am an indigenous Māori from Aotearoa, New Zealand. My Tribal backgrounds are Ngāti Apa, Te Aitanga-a-Hauiti and Ngāti Kahungunu. I work in alternative and conventional education settings to transform high and disproportionate levels of educational under-development. I believe that the social and economic transformation that is necessary by Māori can only be built on a prior or simultaneous education revolution. Furthermore, successful education for Māori must embrace their desire to still 'be Māori' and to maintain their Māori language, knowledge and cultural integrity.